

Monitoring of Polish Visa Policy

Policy paper

Field research

Belarus

Branch of the Center for Human Rights Protection 'Spring', Brest
Branch of the Grodno District Social Association 'Ratusza', Grodno
Centre of Social Innovation, Minsk

Russia

Moscow Helsinki Group, Moscow
Petersburg Center for Human and Political Studies 'Strategy',
Sankt Petersburg
Regiomonti Regional Social Organization for Kaliningrad, Kaliningrad

Ukraine

Centre for Peace, Conversion, and Foreign Policy in Ukraine, Kyiv
European Dialogue, Lviv
Kharkiv Group for Human Rights Protection, Kharkiv
The Association of Support for Civil Initiatives 'Kovcheg', Odessa
Volhynia Association for Defense of Youth Rights, Lutsk

Methodology, sampling design, data analysis

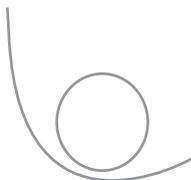
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STEFAN **BATORY**
FOUNDATION

Monitoring of Polish Visa Policy

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Introductory Note

This policy paper summarizes the findings of monitoring of the Polish visa policy that has been conducted within the framework of the project *Monitoring of the Openness of EU Eastern Border*. The project promotes the concept of a friendly and open eastern EU border that would overcome the danger of a 'paper' curtain, separating the new Member States from their neighbors in Eastern Europe. The project has been launched and funded by the Stefan Batory Foundation in Warsaw.

The monitoring of the Polish visa policy was carried out jointly with the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights and Collegium Civitas, a leading private university in Warsaw, as well as non-governmental organizations from Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, each of them operating in one of 11 towns where Polish consulates are based. This exercise followed the introduction by Poland of visa requirement to citizens of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine as of 1 October 2003.

The monitoring was intended to examine the effectiveness of the visa procedures and to determine whether Polish government lived to its promise that visas would be easily accessible and would not inhibit contacts with

Poland's eastern neighbors. The project consisted of four elements: legal analysis of existing regulations; survey of persons requesting visas at Polish consulates; interviews with the consular staff, and an assessment of the quality of the facilities made available by consulates to their clients.

Stefan Batory Foundation

Results from a Survey of the Applicants of the Polish Visa System in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine

Leszek Chajewski

Executive Summary

On October 1, 2004, eight months prior to Poland's accession to EU, a visa system for the Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian nationals was established. This system had a high potential for adversely affecting citizens of Poland's all-important eastern neighbors. Key challenges to a successful implementation of this system included, firstly, the tenuous nature of the transition towards democracy and market – based economies in these three countries and, secondly, the current international climate which often leads to a greater emphasis on security rather than on the convenience and the rights of individuals who cross national borders. This article presents the results from a survey of visa applicants in eleven consulates of the Republic of Poland located in the territories of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. The survey's key objective was to assess the degree of hardship experienced by citizens of these countries during the process of visa application. The key findings include: 1. The process is far less onerous and restrictive that it might have been expected; 2. The visa system, while often appallingly weak with respect to infrastructure, is remarkably strong with processing applications efficiently and with a fair amount of respect for the rights of the applicant; 3. Those consulates are most efficient which have been created specifically to cope with the requirements resulting from Poland's accession to EU; 4. Applicants traveling to

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Poland for economic reasons such as trade, shopping and job search are significantly more likely to experience the visa process as onerous than are tourists and those traveling to Poland on official business. Thus the monitoring for the potential human rights' violations, in addition to its traditional emphasis on the civil rights, should also include screening for the potential systemic bias against low-income and jobless applicants.

Introduction

The EU's new eastern border separates nations that are culturally and linguistically akin and which prior to the watershed year of 1989 shared a common political and economic system. Since then the transition towards democracy and market – based economies in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine has been more tenuous than it was in Central Europe, and an increasingly discernible divide in standards of living as well as in respect for human and political rights has emerged. The new visa system created an obvious risk of deepening the divide further.

However, it was by no means a forgone conclusion that Poland would do its best to implement a visa system minimizing the inevitable inconveniences to the applicants. Poland's common heritage with its eastern neighbors notwithstanding, its relations with Russia and Ukraine have often been thorny and some historical conflicts continue to impede good neighborly relations between Poland and these two countries. While Poland's relations with Belarus have not been hampered by past conflicts, policies of the current Belarusian regime have become a source of new tensions.

Nonetheless, judging from the survey of 1534 visa applicants in Lviv, Lutsk, Kyiv, Odessa, Kharkiv, Brest, Grodno, Minsk, Moscow, Petersburg and Kaliningrad conducted in March of 2004, the visa system is in fact remarkably user-friendly and less restrictive than it might have been justifiably expected. Furthermore, the system is improving and 'learning' from its experiences, despite the continuing lack of funds for improving the physical infrastructure, which in some consulates is wanting.

Key features of the visa system

The visa system for these three countries was established on October 1, 2003. Poland's negotiations with its eastern neighbors had resulted in separate bilateral agreements. The arrangement with Ukraine is asymmetrical as that country's citizens need visas to enter Poland while Poles traveling to Ukraine do not, as long as their stay does not exceed three months. Furthermore, Ukrainians obtain Polish visas free of charge. Belarus government prevailed in its demand that its citizens pay for their visas although certain categories of applicants, particularly the elderly and the youth are exempt. Conversely, Polish citizens have to obtain a visa when planning to travel to Belarus. A similar arrangement was negotiated with Russians, although those living in the Kaliningrad enclave are not charged consular fees. Similarly, Polish nationals traveling to the Kaliningrad enclave are not charged those fees either. A provision shared by all three bilateral agreements is that Polish consulates are compelled to issue visas in an expedited fashion to applicants in special circumstances, for example those faced with family emergencies. Polish visas do not allow their holders to travel to EU countries covered by the Schengen Agreement of 1985. However, citizens of the three countries in question who hold Schengen visas need not apply for a transit visas when traveling through Poland.

From the administrative view point, the visa process, in Poland and elsewhere, is tilted towards the visa issuer: when visa application is denied, the applicant has little recourse. The consular official rejecting the application need not disclose a rationale behind his or her decision. Furthermore, the issuer can undertake a detailed interview with the applicant. However, Polish consulates rarely do so, favoring instead an 'assembly-line' approach to processing visa applications. This is no doubt good news for the visa applicants but it may impede Poland's accession to the Schengen system.

From the vantage point of the applicant, his or her key right is the right to receive information about the visa procedure in the language of his or her choice. The applicant can also file a complaint regarding the adminis-

trative aspects of the process, for example when faced with an arbitrary delay of processing his or her visa application. Lastly, obtaining Polish visa does not guarantee that its holder will be allowed into the territory of the Polish Republic; the border guard personnel retain the right to deny entry. These latter provisions result from the Alien Registration Act of June 13, 2003 (*Ustawa o cudzoziemcach*).

Survey objectives and the system's assessment criteria

Key survey objectives correspond to the potential risks inherent in the newly established system. The first type of potential risk relates to the kinds of constituencies that are served by the entire system and each individual consulate. Key survey measures of this include: 1. The overt and the actual reasons for undertaking a trip to Poland and 2. The demographic characteristics of visa applicants.

The second major risk inherent in the system is its potential for undue restrictiveness and administrative complexity of the process from the applicant's view point. Key measures of this aspect include 1. The proportion of rejected visa applications; 2. The duration of the visa application procedure; 3. The number of visits required to obtain a visa; 4. The amount of time spent in queues; and 5. The quality of infrastructure available to the applicants as they proceed through each phase of the process.

The third risk is particularly important from the vantage point of human rights' advocacy because all countries involved have recent experiences of major violations of these rights. State officials' arrogance, patronizing demeanor, arbitrariness, long lines, complicated bureaucratic procedures were all part of life under state socialism. One might expect that governmental bureaucracies in Poland and other countries of the region have an institutional propensity to deemphasize human rights' importance. Key survey measures of this aspect of the system are as follows: 1. Perceptions of consular staff's behavior and professionalism and 2. Availability of complete and accurate information in the language of the applicant's choice.

In addition to evaluating the three risk areas outlined above, a further objective of the present project was to measure the administrative efficiency of individual consulates. This is accomplished by comparing selected measures of onerousness of the visa procedure at each consulate, particularly the length of lines, against the volume of visa applications received daily by each consulate. While this survey does not allow for measuring of the consulates' absolute performance levels, it allows for a separation of better consulates from the worse ones, thus yielding a straightforward method of generating data-driven recommendations.

Demographic characteristics of the survey sample

According to the official statistics of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as of January 2004, two months prior to the study, about four thousand people applied for Polish visas on any given day in the territory of Poland's three non-EU eastern neighbors. Most applications (70%) were filed in Ukraine, 16% in Belarus and 14% in Russia. These proportions match the citizenship status and nationality of the present survey's respondents: 68% of survey respondents were Ukrainians, 11% Belarusian nationals, while Russians comprised 16% of the sample. Polish nationality was declared by 3% of the respondents. This latter group of respondents concentrated in Belarus, particularly in the Grodno area (Chart 1: Nationality). In turn, respondents' ethnicity was nearly identical to their citizenship status. Thus the survey sample reflected the studied population with a remarkable precision.

About a half of the respondents are in their prime working age of 30 to 49. Another 30% are 18 to 28 year olds. Only 6% of the sample are the elderly, those 66 years of age and older. While the gender composition of the sample is nearly perfectly balanced, relatively fewer older men and fewer younger women travel to Poland. Not surprisingly, most frequent reasons for traveling to Poland were economic. Small-scale traders and shoppers constituted 29% of the sample. One quarter of the sample were

tourists. Plans to visit family and friends were given as reasons for applying by 23%. Official business or other job-related purposes for traveling were given by 14%. Job seekers constituted 8% of the sample. Relatively small proportion (6%) applied in order to participate in sports events, cultural or academic exchanges (Chart 2: Purposes of Travel).

Thus 37% of the respondents revealed to interviewers that their reasons for traveling to Poland were economic. Conventional wisdom suggests that in fact the population proportion of small traders and job seekers must be much higher. This can be discerned by analyzing demographic characteristics of respondents from each country separately.

Economic reasons were particularly common among Ukrainian applicants (35%) and among Belarusians (27%). Very few Russians (2%) declared small-scale trade, shopping and job search as reasons for travel. Apparently, low-income and jobless Russians do not find it economically viable to travel to Poland to earn a living. Thus the proportions of those traveling to Poland for economic reasons correspond to the levels of education and employment status of visa applicants from these three countries. Those applying for visas in Russia are highly educated (61% were college graduates), while only 46% of Belarusians and 40% of Ukrainians completed post-secondary education. About one half of Ukrainians and one third of Belarusians applying for visas were jobless. The highest employment rate was reported by Russians (nearly three quarters) (Chart 3: Employment Status). These findings suggest that the actual proportion of respondents going to Poland for economic reasons is at least 15% greater than what was reported by these respondents. It is highly implausible that the unemployed can afford traveling to Poland as bona fide tourists.

Determinants of perceptions of hardship of the visa application process

Generally, respondents do not view the application process as particularly onerous. One quarter of Ukrainians, 10% of respondents from Belarus and only 4% of Russians reported experiencing hardship (Chart 4: Hardship). The low levels of perceived hardship and, conversely, high levels of satisfaction are perhaps the single most surprising result from the survey. But these results must be taken with a grain of salt: because respondents were interviewed at the very end of the visa application process and because very few (1%) of them were denied visas, their perceptions of hardship might have been lower at the time of interview than they might have been at an earlier stage of the process.

Experiences of hardship, when they occur, result primarily from the administrative deficiencies of the system, particularly from the length of the entire procedure and the necessity to report to the consulate more than once before the process is completed.

The key measure of administrative organization of the process is the length of queues. At the time of the survey 70% of Ukrainian and 64% of Belarusians had to wait in lines during at least one phase of the visa process. Those applying in Russia were more fortunate, as only 20% of them had to queue up. Lines were especially long in Lviv and Lutsk, i.e. in the consulates handling the largest numbers of applications. The average total time an applicant had to actually spend standing in lines was 200 minutes for Lviv, 115 minutes in Lutsk, while in Petersburg it was only 10 minutes (Chart 5: Average Time in Lines). These long waiting times are particularly troubling for the applicant given that queues typically form outdoors. The absence of basic infrastructure allowing visa applicants to wait in civilized conditions is perhaps the most disturbing feature of the Polish visa system. The relative insensitivity of the Polish officials to this problem can be explained only through the uniquely Eastern European and very recent experience of life that was very much defined by waiting

in lines. On the other hand, the problem is being addressed indirectly, by expediting the visa process which now is taking only a fraction of the time observed prior to the study.

Most of casual observers of how the system operates believe that long lines are the most important source of hardship to the applicants. However, statistical modeling (see the Appendix) shows that a far more significant predictor of onerousness of the process is its duration and the total number of visits required to complete it. Indeed, when all three measures (time spent in lines, the length of the process and the number of visits) are considered simultaneously, the effect of time spent in lines on the perception of hardship is no longer statistically significant. Apparently, the applicants have relatively high tolerance for queues, but do not appreciate the necessity to make repeat visits to the consulate; those arriving from outside the metropolitan area where the consulate is located may need to stay overnight or undertake an additional journey. For example, when applying in Lviv, Kaliningrad and Grodno, it may be necessary to visit the consulate two to three times. On the other hand, in Lutsk, Kyiv, Odessa and Moscow one to two visits typically suffice (Chart 6: Average Number of Visits).

As both the number of visits and the length of the procedure remain highly significant when included in the statistical model simultaneously, it is likely that the measure of the length of the visa procedure captures yet another source of applicant frustration: uncertainty about how to plan their travel to Poland and possibly also the frustration about the necessity to take time off work. Indeed, when applying in Lviv one had to wait the average of four days (23 hours) before the application process was completed (Chart 7: Average Length of the Procedure). However, we are happy to report that the length of the procedure in Lviv has shortened considerably since the study was conducted.

Having said this, we must also discuss factors which make the visa application process easier and more pleasant. The statistical modeling demonstrated a surprising sensitivity of the applicants to the behavior of consular personnel and security guards. Consular and security personnel's demeanor

has a greater effect on reducing the hardship of the visa procedure than the length and the number of visits do in terms of increasing the hardship of the experience. Generally speaking, the assessment of the work of the personnel was remarkably positive (Charts 8 and 9: Positive Evaluation of Consular Staff/Security Personnel). There are two caveats to this though: 1. Security services are typically outsourced to the local firms and those apparently do a worse job than do the consular workers, performance of the latter being assessed by the applicants as nothing short of exemplary; 2. Ukrainians were less satisfied than those applying for visas in other two countries. This may result from the fact that Ukrainians travel to Poland in greatest numbers and are perhaps more demanding than their Russian and Belarusian counterparts.

Access to information

Applicants are legally entitled to receive relevant instructions about the visa procedure in the language of their choice. The accuracy of information regarding the visa process is decisive for the smoothness of the entire experience to both the applicant and the issuer of visas. Unfortunately, most survey respondents rely on information gathered from acquaintances (47%), which is likely to be less accurate than are the official sources of information. Over one third (34%) relies on information obtained directly at the consulate. The print media (20%) and television (12%) are also frequently used. As sources of information, of least significance are the Internet (6%) and travel agencies (3%) (Chart 10: Sources of Information). Where applicants are least educated and conversely, where economic purposes for travel dominate, i.e. particularly in Ukraine, the applicants turn for information to their acquaintances. Those applying for visas in Ukraine rely on information from their acquaintances far more frequently (52%) than those applying in Belarus (43%) and Russia (25%) (Chart 11: Information Sources by Country). Conversely, the applicants in Russia are more likely to use consulate sources of information than

are their Ukrainian and Belarusian counterparts. Statistical modeling reveals that those traveling to Poland for economic reasons are less likely to gather information from official sources. This is not surprising, given that they probably perceive cross border trade and informal employment in Poland as nothing to be proud of. Because economically-driven travel prevails among applicants in Ukraine and Belarus, relatively fewer people in those countries will rely on official sources of information.

The only way to remedy this problem is to ensure high quality and accessibility of information that can be obtained directly at the consulate. The most frequently used sources of information within the consulate are the information board (89% of those inquiring within) and consular officials themselves (50%). About one third (31%) of these respondents obtained information over the phone, while information leaflets were used by 29%. The Internet was used by 16%.

When it comes to oral communication, applicants faced few difficulties in communicating with consulate officials. There were some exceptions from this rule, however. For example 7% of applicants in Russia preferred to communicate in Polish but only 3% encountered Polish-speaking consular officials. Similarly, in Belarus only 2% were able to communicate in their native language even though 17% preferred to do so (Tables 24 and 25 of the report).

It is impossible to underestimate the importance of the information board, typically but not always located outside the consulate, as means of transmitting instructions to the visa applicants. However, there is some room for improvement in this regard. Applicants in Belarus apparently receive information that is not getting across. As a result, difficulties with filling out the application were most prevalent in this country; as many as 23% Belarusians reported difficulties with filling out the visa application forms (Table 28 of the report). A significant portion of these difficulties result from the transliteration requirement. In Poland the Latin alphabet is used, in its eastern neighbors, however, the Cyrillic one. When filling out forms, visa applicants are required to convert Cyrillic characters to Latin ones.

Respondents value information available directly from the consular officials more than the information displayed on information boards (Chart 12: Quality of Information: Board versus Staff). It remains an open question whether these respondents value oral communication with the staff more than information published on the board because of its quality or because information boards contain incomplete or inaccessible instructions. When communicating with the consular officials, Ukrainian applicants use most frequently their native language but as many as 25% use Russian. However, when it comes to materials available on information boards, only 5% of these respondents found materials in the Russian language. Perhaps the importance of Russian as the language of written instructions is underestimated by Polish consular officials.

Efficiency

It was not possible to measure satisfaction with the visa system in absolute terms. However, the testimony of representatives of NGOs working in the countries where the survey was conducted suggests that the Polish visa system is viewed very favorably in comparison with the systems established by other Central European countries, for example the Czech Republic. A good indicator of how the applicants perceive the Polish visa system is a high proportion of respondents who indicated that they personally and others around them were treated well or very well by consulate officials (Chart 13: Positive Evaluation of Treatment at Each Stage). High satisfaction scores regarding the degree of hardship of the entire process also suggest that the organization of the visa system exceeded the expectations of Poland's eastern neighbors. Furthermore, contrary to widespread concerns after the new visa system had been introduced, the intensity of travel to and from Poland declined by smaller percentages that many had feared: 6.6% for Russians, 16.2% for Ukrainians and 14% for Belarusians. Also the efficiency of processing the applications has been improving as the system has matured. As one Lviv interviewer

*reported: initially (in October 2003) you had to wait in lines for 14 days and various 'institutions' bordering on fraud popped up, for example, queue 'professionals', selling their spots in lines for a fee, self-proclaimed 'guards' who supervised lines at night, and 'alternative' queues (competing with the lines that had been formed earlier). The situation has gradually improved. Now the paperwork can be filed in the morning and visas are available for pick up in the afternoon. During the time of study the office hours of the office issuing tags was extended by two hours, which had shortened lines and made it possible to receive visa on the same day. The lines, once comprising of up to **two thousand persons decreased to one to two hundred**. On some days, there are no lines.*

This shows that the system as a whole has been favorably received. However, the performance of individual consulates varies greatly. As noted earlier, statistical analysis of how onerous the visa process is revealed that the demographic composition of the population of applicants served by a consulate, particularly education and stated reasons for traveling to Poland, explains a significant proportion of variations in the perceptions of the hardship of the visa process. On the other hand, the length of lines in each consulate is very strongly correlated with the number of applicants served daily by the consulate. To evaluate each consulate's performance we selected three measures of efficiency: 1. The total amount of time spent in lines; 2. The amount of time spent in line to pick up visas; 3. The number of visits necessary to complete the entire process. We then regressed each of these three measures of efficiency on the volume of traffic and, additionally, on the proportion of applicants traveling to Poland for economic reasons and on the proportion of applicants with college education. This procedure yielded the net length of time spent in lines and the net number of visits per applicant, statistically controlling for the effect of the prevalence of 'difficult' applicants, i.e. those going to Poland of economic reasons and for the prevalence of 'easy' to handle, highly educated applicants.

Next we compared the actual average waiting times in minutes and actual average numbers of visits against the results predicted through sta-

tistical modeling; the latter shows what portion of variation in time spent in lines and in the number of visits can be explained by factors beyond the consulate's control (Charts 14 through 16: Efficiency). For example, in Lviv, given the proportion of the total applications that are filed there and taking into account the effect of education and reasons for travel, one could expect 170 minutes of total waiting time. However, the average total time spent waiting in lines reported by survey respondents was for this consulate 200 minutes. Thus, on this efficiency measure Lviv performed worse than expected. Conversely, applicants in Brest could be expected to wait in lines 64 minutes but in fact spent 'only' 40 minutes in line or lines. Thus the Brest consulate did better than expected because the applicants waited in lines 24 minutes less than it was predicted on the basis of the volume of traffic and demographic characteristics of the population that this consulate serves.

We performed this procedure for three efficiency measures to increase the precision of our ranking of consulates. For example, we considered total time spent in lines and the amount of time spent in the visa pick up line because respondents might have had hard time recalling the amount of time spent in each line. Therefore, we also focused on the last phase of the visa procedure, the line to the window where visas are issued. The third measure was introduced because many applicants travel to their respective consulates from distant locations; if the procedure requires an overnight stay or a repeated journey, the hardship of the process increases dramatically and thus the efficiency of the consulate decreases. Unfortunately, the number of visits required by a consulate is nearly unrelated to the proportion of the total number of visa applications processed at the consulate. Therefore we have less confidence in this last measure of consulate efficiency. We thus obtained three rankings of consulates for each of the three measures of efficiency. The highest ranking consulate on each of the measures was assigned 10 points and the lowest ranking 0 points. Thus the highest combined score for all three measures was 30 and lowest was 0 (Chart 17: Ranking of Consulates).

The most probable explanation of consulates' performance is the physical infrastructure that each of them has at its disposal. For example, Lviv, the worst performer, badly needs additional office space. It is currently located in a villa-size building. Another plausible explanation is that some consulates have existed for decades and after the introduction of the new visa system they have been continuing to perform their original mission, unrelated to visa application processing. For example, the consulate in Lutsk, the best performer, was created specifically to deal with the increased number of visa traffic after Poland's EU accession. This particular consulate did not require internal restructuring and reassigning workers from other tasks to positions related to visa processing.

Technical note

1. Stratified, non-proportional, systematic sampling design was utilized.
2. The initial estimated sample size was 1120 ($p=0.3$; with $\pm 3\%$ precision and 95% confidence interval). Assuming the 80% response rate and having adjusted the individual consulate sampling rates in order to draw at least 100 cases in each of them, the final sample size was 1777.
3. In absence of a sampling frame, points in time were drawn instead. Starting points were drawn randomly, while subsequent points were obtained by adding a sampling interval to the previously drawn point in time.
4. Interviewers were instructed to approach the first person leaving the consulate at the designated time. Adherence to interview schedules was spot-checked by regional supervisors who paid unannounced visits to consulates; interviewers were not aware that they are observed but had been told that spot-checks were planned.
5. Three two-day training sessions for interviewers were organized.
6. The questionnaire was pre-tested with the help of representatives of local NGOs and subsequently also tested in the field.
7. The questionnaire was available in three languages: Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian.
8. The actual survey response rate was 87%. Out of 1763 interview attempts, 1534 were successful.
9. All questionnaires and the screeners documenting interview refusals have been archived and deposited at Collegium Civitas in Warsaw and are available for review.

Recommendations

Most of the recommendations are data-driven and stem directly from the material presented in this paper. They are as follows:

1. The time applicants spend on the initial phases of the process should be shortened. Obtaining visa applications and information, and filing documents can be easily expedited without an additional capital investment. For example, in Grodno, Moscow, Petersburg, Minsk and Lutsk visa applications are now issued within the consulates, only during the office hours. There is little justification for this approach.
2. The total number of visits necessary to complete the process should be reduced because the need of an overnight stay in the city where the consulate is located or of repeated journeys to that city creates a great deal of undue hardship.
3. While high notes for professionalism of consulate staff are commendable, there are some concerns about the behavior of security personnel, particularly in Ukraine. Security guards are hired locally because they operate outside of the boundaries of the consulates; however, they need better training so that they adopt a more customer-friendly approach to applicants rather than the aloof, Soviet-era demeanor which they are now predisposed to present.

4. Improving access to information and improving the quality of this information should be treated as a never-ending process. Information boards should be placed both outside and inside the consulates. All key instructions, including samples of completed applications, transliteration rules as well as consulate office hours, phone numbers, and locations of nearest border crossings should all be clearly displayed, preferably in all major languages spoken by the target populations. Because Internet use is still quite limited in these three countries, automatic phone help lines should be established and their availability advertised in the local media. Take-home information leaflets should also be made available.
5. The burden of converting Cyrillic text into the Latin alphabet should be shifted from the applicant to the consulate staff. There is little justification, legal or otherwise, for requiring applicants to use an alphabet they most frequently do not know and rarely use in other situations.
6. In the light of the remarkably low visa application rejection rate of 1% (this finding was confirmed by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs), it is obvious that repeat applicants apparently receive subsequent visas without difficulty. In the interest of reducing the volume of traffic, it is therefore advisable to extend the visa expiration period to at least five-six months, as opposed to the current practice of issuing visas which are most frequently valid for only one month. While the present study did not include questions regarding visa expiration dates, anecdotal evidence suggests that many applicants find consulates' decisions regarding how long a visa is valid to be highly arbitrary.
7. It is understandable that a great deal of capital investment in consulates' infrastructure may not be forthcoming for some time. However, there are relatively simple improvements that can ease the unnecessary hardship that applicants currently suffer. The lobby of each consulate

should be open before the official office hours, particularly in winter months. Encouraging small business to establishing side-walk kiosks with beverages and snacks should also be considered, particularly around consulates serving large numbers of applicants.

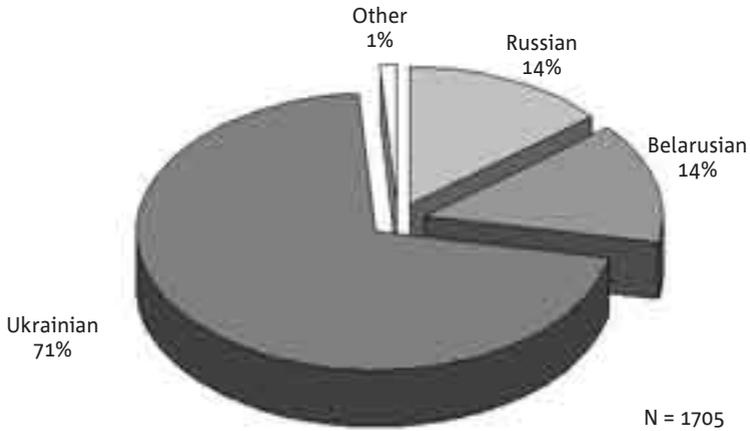
These recommendations notwithstanding, the implementation of the new visa system must be viewed as a success. What is most encouraging is the fact that the consulates ‘learn’ relatively quickly, thus shortening lines and making the entire experience easier on applicants. Let us hope that this research will further improve the visa system’s pace of learning.

In summary, this study has demonstrated that despite the severe shortcomings that surfaced during the first weeks after visas had been introduced, Polish authorities have met the challenge of implementing an efficient, customer-friendly system of visa issuance, thus preventing a major decline in visits to Poland from Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.

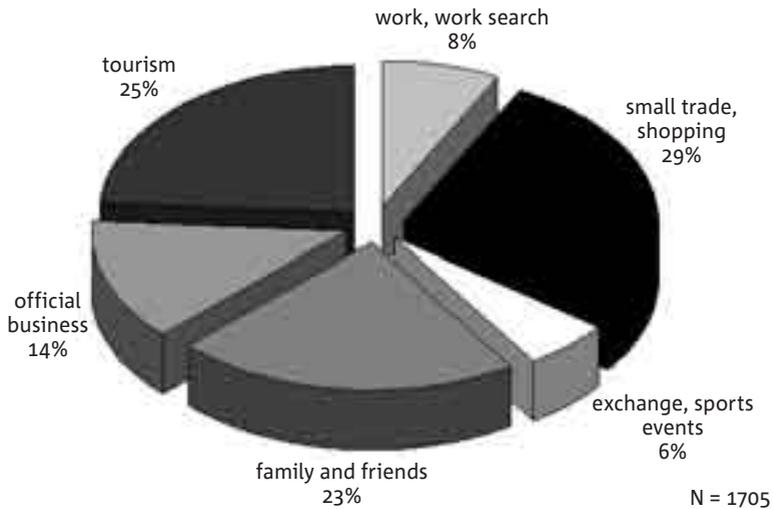
Overall, this visa system proved to be quite liberal. This begs the question whether the approach adopted by Poland will be maintained after the extension of the Schengen system onto new Member States. How will these states respond to pressures from their EU peers to make visa policies more restrictive? Conversely, can the Schengen system be augmented in the light of the Polish experience described in this report? Finally, what lessons can be drawn from this experience for the future visa-related negotiations with Russia and Ukraine under the European Neighborhood Policy?

These are key challenges for the future, and the way they are met will determine the further evolution of policies and practices monitored during this project. This in turn will profoundly affect the degree of openness and friendliness of EU external borders in the eyes of its eastern neighbors.

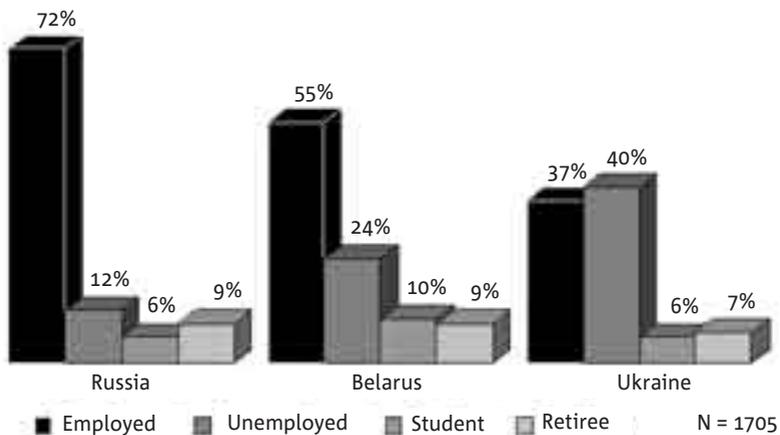
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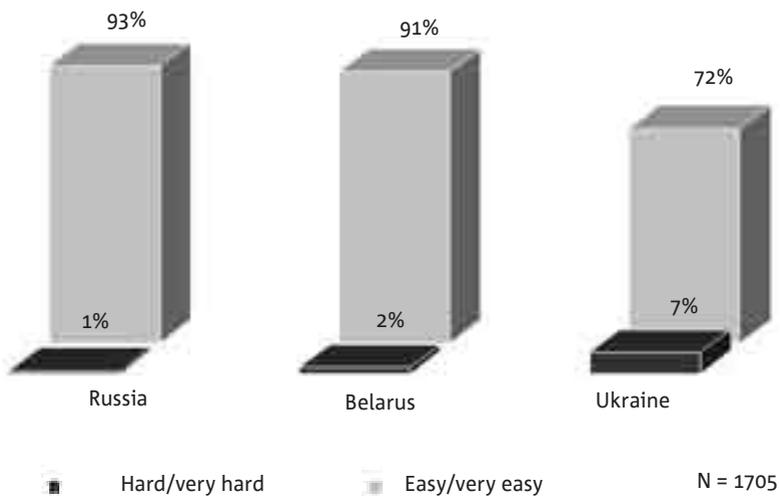
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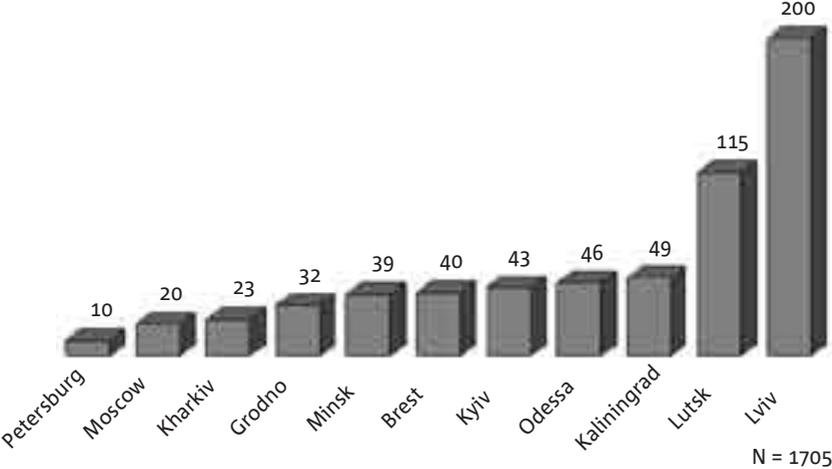
3. Employment Status



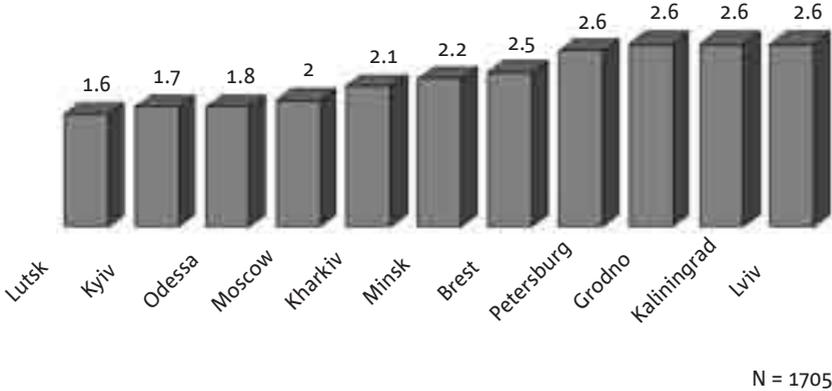
4. Hardship



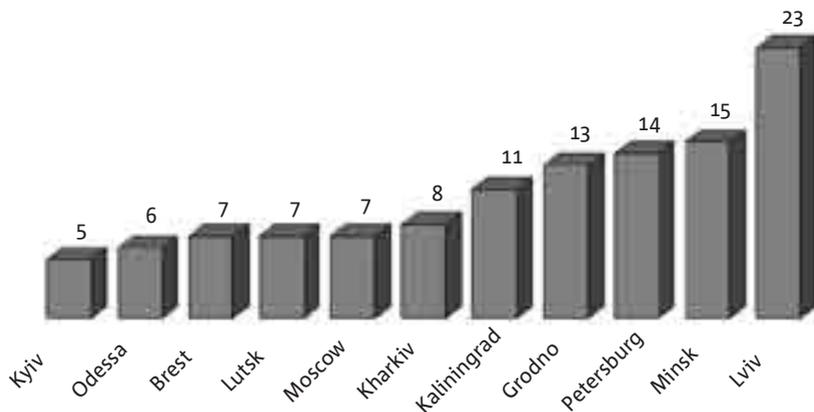
5. Time Spent in Lines (in minutes)



6. Number of Visits

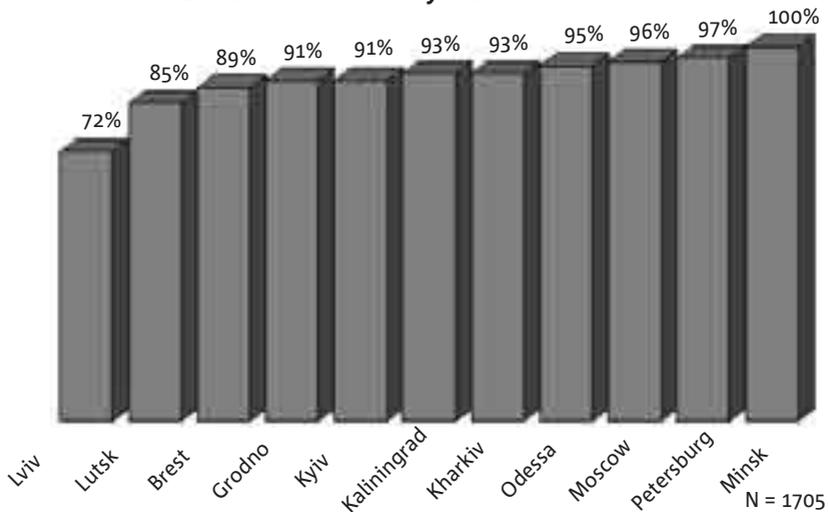


7. Length of Visa Process (in hours)



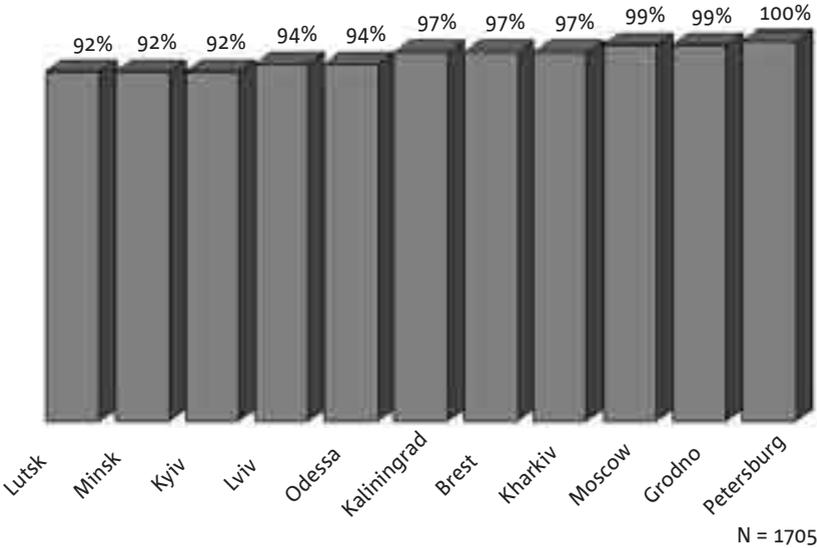
N = 1705

8. Positive Evaluation of Security Personnel

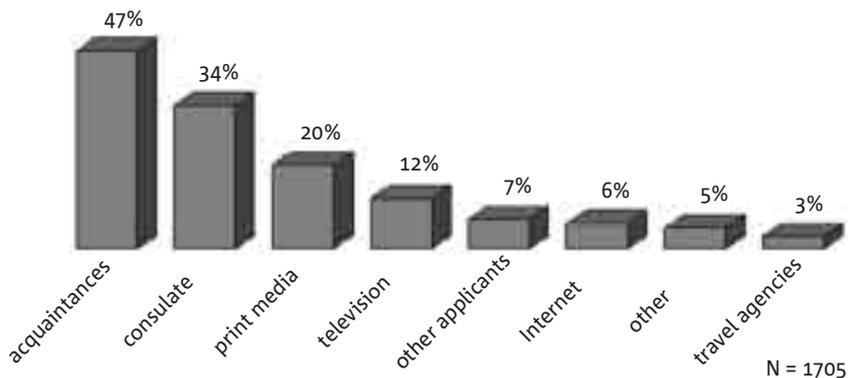


N = 1705

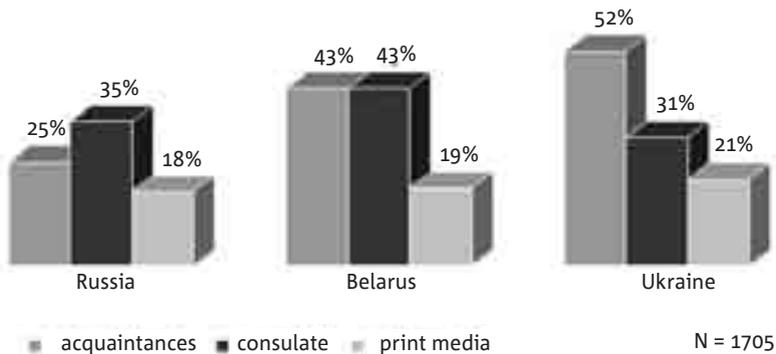
9. Positive Evaluation of Consular Staff



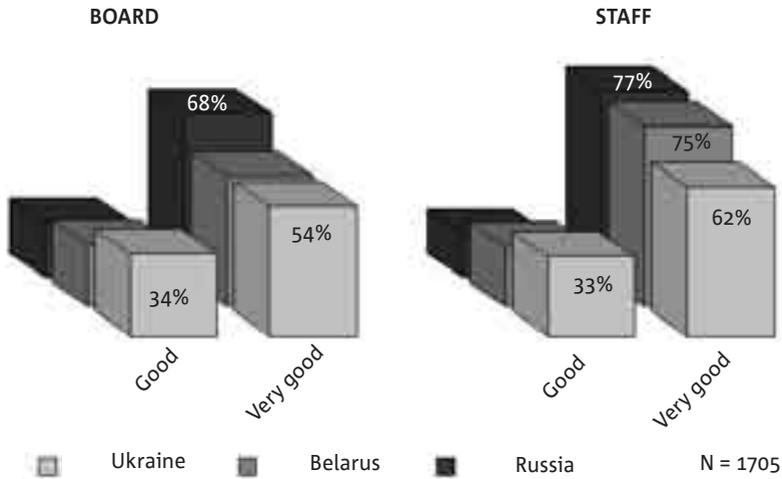
10. Information Sources



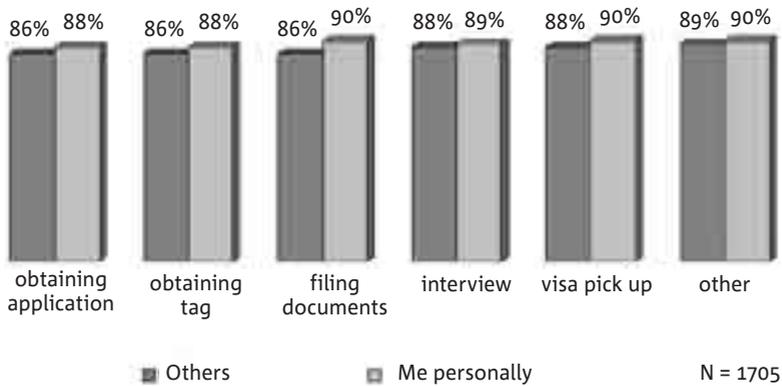
11. Information Sources by Country



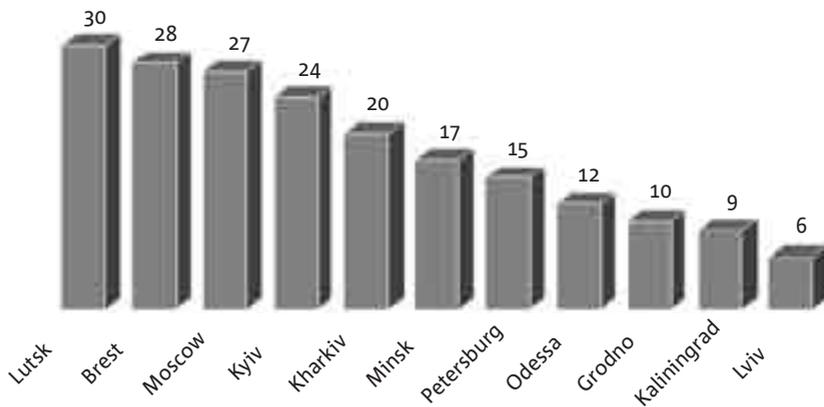
12. Quality of Information



13. Positive Evaluation of Treatment



17. Consulate Ranking



Appendix: ols regression

		N	Mean	SD
Dependent				
HARDSHIP	Perception of hardship experienced during the visa process (1=Very onerous; 2= Onerous; 3=Somewhat onerous; 4=Easy; 5=Very easy)	1374	4.19	0.94
Independent				
SECURITY	Evaluation of behavior of security personnel (1=Very bad....5=Very good)	1314	4.32	0.90
STAFF	Evaluation of behavior of consulate staff (1=Very bad....5=Very good)	1419	4.57	0.68
LENGHT	Length of the entire visa process (in hours)	1412	12.00	23.18
VISITS	Total number of visits in the consulate	1367	2.10	1.09
QUEUETIME	Total time spent in all lines (in minutes)	908	384.67	509.44
Controls				
ECONOMIC	Economic purposes of travel (1=Yes; 0=No)	1705	0.29	0.45
JOBLESS	Unemployed (1=Yes; 0=No)	1705	0.28	0.45
AGE	Age	1361	37.58	11.64
GENDER	Gender (1=Female 0=Male)	1416	0.51	0.50
EDU	Education	1342	2.45	0.53
			%	
COUNTRY	Russia (1)	228	13.4	
	Belarus (2)	280	16.4	
	Ukraine (3)	1197	70.2	
	Total	1705	100.0	
CITY	Moscov (1)	139	7.8	
	Petersburg (2)	107	6.0	
	Kaliningrad (3)	332	18.7	
	Lviv (4)	191	10.7	
	Lutsk (5)	185	10.4	
	Kyiv (6)	107	6.0	
	Kharkiv (7)	104	5.8	
	Odessa (8)	110	6.2	
	Minsk (9)	197	11.1	
	Grodno (10)	142	8.0	
	Brest (11)	166	9.3	
	Total	1780	100.0	

Dependent **HARDSHIP** Perception of hardship experienced during the visa application process (1=Very onerous; 2= Onerous; 3=Somewhat onerous; 4=Easy; 5=Very easy)

	Model 1 (controls only)			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4			Model 5		
	B (uns.)	SE	SIG	B	SE	SIG									
Constant	3.946	0.174	0.000**	2.546	0.209	0.000**	1.567	0.237	0.000**	1.497	0.241	0.000**	1.835		
ECONOMIC	-0.662	0.058	0.000**	-0.517	0.058	0.000**	-0.528	0.056	0.000**	-0.511	0.057	0.000**	-0.479		
JOBLESS	-0.120	0.061	0.051*	-0.098	0.060	0.102	-0.081	0.058	0.164	-0.090	0.059	0.130	-0.121		
AGE	0.012	0.002	0.000**	0.009	0.002	0.000**	0.006	0.002	0.005**	0.006	0.002	0.006**	0.007		
GENDER	-0.087	0.053	0.101	-0.020	0.052	0.698	-0.007	0.050	0.891	-0.006	0.051	0.910	0.038		
EDU	0.033	0.053	0.530	-0.012	0.053	0.819	-0.019	0.052	0.716	0.003	0.053	0.957	0.004		
SECURITY				0.364	0.029	0.000**	0.261	0.031	0.000**	0.260	0.031	0.000**	0.264		
STAFF							0.336	0.041	0.000**	0.345	0.042	0.000**	0.316		
LENGTH										-0.002	0.001	0.015*	-0.002		
VISITS															
QUEUE TIME															
Adjusted R ²	0.149			0.259			0.305			0.307			0.330		



www.openborders.ngo.pl

Welcome to the website created under the project *Monitoring of the Openness of the EU Eastern Border* of the Stefan Batory Foundation and the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, in cooperation with Collegium Civitas and non-governmental organizations and academic centers from Poland, Belarus Russia and Ukraine.

The website features:

- documents, information and opinions on Polish and EU visa and border policy,
- information on the current edition of the project,
- an archive of the previous editions, containing, among others, the publication: *Monitoring Poland's Eastern Borders. Report.*

We warmly invite you to share your experiences applying for a Polish visa or crossing the border, and to send us your questions or complaints.

Our patron is www.ngo.pl a portal of non-governmental organizations, which is financially supported by the Open Society Institute, the East-East Program and the Stefan Batory Foundation.

